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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 January 2002]

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*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

Situation of Refugees in France

1. Over the past years, the European Union has given a special priority to the issues of migration and asylum. In 1999, the Treaty of Amsterdam entered into force which gave more powers to the European Union institutions regarding the resolution of migration and asylum problems. It was in Tampere European Council that the governments reconfirmed their commitments made under the Treaty of Amsterdam. Just recently, a European Conference on Migration was held in Brussels in October 2001, which not only discussed the consequences of the terrorist attacks in the United States of America on migration policies, but also tried to have a look at the different migration policies of EU members.

2. In this atmosphere, on the last days of 2001, it was reported that hundreds of refugees living in an overcrowded Red Cross center on the English Channel coast decided to pass the 31-mile channel tunnel on 26 December 2001, which was ended with clouds of tear gas as police dispersed the refugees and arrested a number of them in the tunnel. Dramatic footage shown on French television from tunnel security cameras showing a game of fox and hounds between the French police and the asylum-seekers played out in the yellowish-brown light of the security lamps. This incident highlighted the fate of about 1,300 Iraqi Kurds, Afghans, Iranians and Africans refugees holed up indefinitely in Sangatte (northern French village). It has been reported that a court in Boulogne gave four refugees who broke down security fences, four-month jail sentences for "mass destruction of property and entering France illegally". It was more of a protest movement, said the spokesman, François Borel. "They wanted to attract attention to the situation in the detention camp, situated in Sangatte.

3. It seems that there are restrictive policies towards asylum-seekers in France. Just in 2000, France played host to about 26,200 refugees and asylum seekers in need of protection, from which, 5185 individuals were granted asylum in that year and an estimated 21,000 asylum seekers remained with pending applications and no response from authorities.

4. The reason why the refugees would like to continue to reach Britain is its relatively liberal asylum laws and dreams of new homes and jobs. Some refugees claim that they have families or friends in the United Kingdom. Some asylum-seekers are educated professionals desperate for a better life. That's why they are even ready to pay smugglers fees of anything between $25,000 to $40,000 to get out of France for another country.

5. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) expresses its concern over the fate of these refugees in France and requests the officials to take necessary measures to study their situation as soon as possible. It seems a reform is needed in France's restrictive interpretation of its obligations under the Refugee Convention. We would like to draw the attention of the European countries to Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights about the free movement of the people as well as the humanitarian principles embodied in the Convention and Protocol on the Status of Refugees and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusions that the host countries should make greater and harmonized efforts to integrate refugees and their families in the labor market, and give more value to the contribution that they make to the European societies.